

NATIONAL CENTER for MONTESSORI in the PUBLIC SECTOR

0–6 Early Learning Initiative

Why a Focus on Early Childhood?

In February of 2013, President Obama announced the President’s Early Learning Initiative to focus on improving access to high-quality early care and education.¹ Over the past four decades numerous studies — such as the Perry Preschool Study, the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Longitudinal Study, and the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study—have indicated that high-quality early childhood education increases the likelihood that children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will become successful students and citizens.

Montessori is a well-established and time-tested approach to early learning. A growing body of research on Montessori education demonstrates the superior impact of learning environments that are structured, exploratory, and highly enriched with developmentally appropriate materials and resources.² When children have a robust and positive foundation that supports strong cognition, executive functions, social-emotional development, and non-cognitive skills, they enter school and society from a place of strength. High quality Montessori education provides this foundation, and our goal is to bring it to scale for all families through the public system.

NCMPS is the lead organization working in conjunction with Montessori educators, associations, and activists to bring high-quality Montessori education as a viable and accessible alternative—if not the standard approach—to 0-6 education in this country.

The Challenge

While interest in both Montessori and early learning continues rise, only a few states are able to provide the funding and policy infrastructure to support high quality, fully implemented Montessori programming. The core elements of authentic Montessori—mixed age grouping, extended periods of uninterrupted work, specially trained teachers, and entrance by the age of three—often run counter to established preschool practices. Yet research has shown that maintaining these high standards produces the best outcomes for children and families.³ Policies that prevent the delivery of best Montessori practice are a major obstacle to access and equity.

The Opportunity

Despite these challenges, there is great momentum and interest at the local level for expanded Montessori opportunities in early childhood. With elbow grease and determination from parent groups, educators, district leaders and charter school organizers, ECE Montessori programs are growing and children are thriving.

In order to achieve success on this initiative, we need:

- Our highest level leaders and policymakers to be knowledgeable about Montessori education
- Montessori representation on advisory committees and work groups creating regulations, grant applications and review
- Funding for large-scale research, program support and teacher training

We are encouraged by the public commitment to our youngest students; it is now imperative that we get this right and offer the very best we have to give. We at NCMPS and in the Montessori community want to

support and facilitate the Federal and State governments as they work towards this goal.

We look forward to continued contact as the President, Secretary and the Department of Education move forward with the Early Learning Initiative.

Notes

¹ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2013). The President's Early Learning Initiative: A birth to five continuum of high quality early care and education. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/presidents-early-learning-initiative-early-care-education>

² Diamond, A., & Lee, K. (2011). Interventions shown to aid executive function development in children 4 to 12 years old. *Science*, 333(6045), 959-964.

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Lillard, A., & Else-Quest, N. (2006). The early years: Evaluating Montessori education. *Science*, 313, 1893–1894.

³ Lillard, A. S. (2012). Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology*, 50, 379–401.